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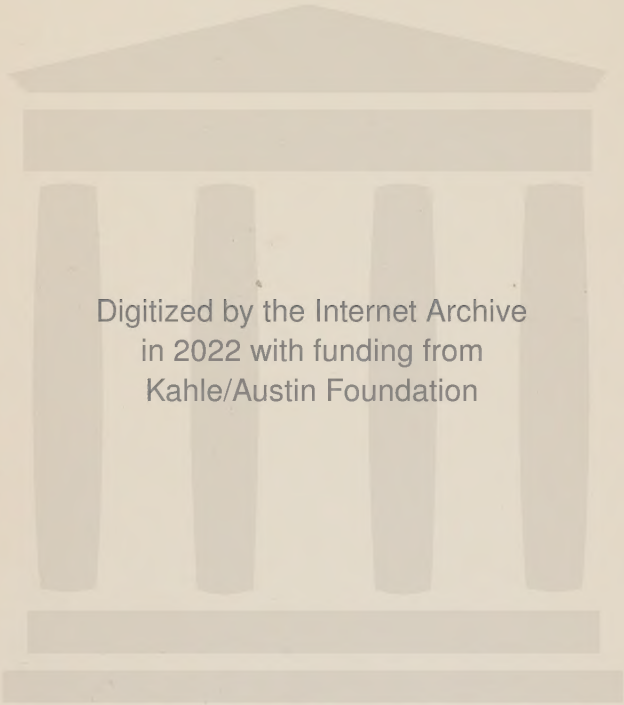
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CONTEMPORARIES

FROM

TENNESSEE

CONTEMPORARIES FROM TENNESSEE

An Anthology

of

University of Tennessee Verse

1920-1930

Edited by

B. S. Ivey

Knoxville
S. B. Newman & Co.
1930

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This book is respectfully dedicated

to our friendly contemporary,

Dr. Roscoe E. Parker

FOREWORD

The purpose of this book is to present, as fairly and effectively as possible, the tendencies of our contemporary university poets. In addition to indicating their main currents of thought, we hope this collection will reflect the active interest among our associates in the study of forms and in the expression of ideas.

We frankly realize that this can be little more than an introductory volume. Unfortunately, lack of both time and money has sadly limited the scope of our undertaking. However, if we receive enough substantial encouragement, and if we do not find too many neglected *Contemporaries* lying around our rooms next summer, we firmly intend to begin work on a more complete and a more thoroly representative anthology covering the whole of the long period since the founding of the institution in 1794.

Contemporaries from Tennessee is, of course, a very small venture in book-making. Relatively speaking, it is no larger and no more impressive in the literary world, than is a tree-shadowed summerhouse in the vast realm of architectural wonders. And yet,—here we have gathered a few of our own productions, with as many more of those near *contemporaries* who preceded us on "The Hill;" and here, without further explanations and without any apologies, we hopefully leave our modest exhibits for the reader who may wish to pay us an occasional visit. The mere fluttering of the leaves should suffice to summon our flattered spirits.

B. S. Ivey,
Earl Devon,
Don Carlos Pamplin,
May, 1930. Elizabeth Fleming Parks.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The design used on the cover was drawn by Mr. George Mooers in 1921.

"Tennessee," "The Viols," and "Of a Christian Town" are reprinted from the two volumes of *Overtones;* the poems of Mr. Stanley Johnson first appeared in *The Fugitive;* "Abandoned Roads" won the Ossoli Poetry Prize for 1930. We also wish to acknowledge the pioneering work of Dr. Charles Bell Burke, Mr. Zoe Wells Carroll, Mr. John Zollie Howard, Mr. Oscar Wood McCleary, Mr. H. Melville Sayre and Mr. Harry C. Watkin, the literary advisers and editors of *Overtones.*

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THE POET'S PRAYER

Give me the longing for water of dying men in a desert
With the lonely Icelander's desire to see the sun;
Give my imagination the wings of the dove,
My fancy the whimsical ways of the zigzagging bat;
And grant me, living, the dying man's love of life;
And dying, the brave man's abandon,
the smile of the fatalist,
the faith of the Christian,
and the hope of the rotting flesh
resurrected when Easter
remembers the world.

—*B. S. I.*

I

TRUTH

While groping once, there came to me
A man with calm and steady tread.
"Why do you hesitate?" said he;
"How can I help but doubt?" I said.
"My friend," said he, " 'tis easy; choose
To believe whether you believe or not;
Whatever chance, you've naught to lose;
If it be right, why, then you've got
Eternal life as your reward;
If wrong, you're doomed: no matter what
You believe, your fate is no less hard."
He ceased, and in me rose this thought:
If to play safe, to hear self-interest's calls
Must form the basis of our wrong and
right—
O God, if this be truth, may I be false;
If this be faith, may I be faithless quite!

1929

BOHEMIA

Smell of frying grease,
The static hum of a radio
Perched high on a shaky shelf,
Rows of faces over a counter
Chewing, chewing food;
Newspapers scattered. . .
Little boys poking idle fingers
Into the food.
Laughter, carefree informality—
Dear symbols of
The Greasy Spoon.

1928

COMPLAINT

Oh, God that gave a heart to hope,
  Desire to believe and power to feel,
Why didst Thou give a mind to grope,
  To grapple till our senses reel
With all the doubts and fears that must
Assail our natural wish to trust?

Why didst Thou suffer man to think
  And prosper thus inquiring science,
If by its gains we reach the brink
  Of doubt and unwilling defiance
When we must either plunge, forsooth,
Or else a traitor be to truth?

Oh, heart that bids me to admit
  Sweet hopes of our futurity—
Oh, reason, cold, that bids me quit
  False hopes for true uncertainty—
Oh, God, must I forever be
Torn thus by these two parts of me?

SOLITAIRE

Dawn—
And one head-print on the pillow,
A grounds-choked coffee-pot,
Cobwebs draping the corners,
Some dry bread bought and forgot,
A shaving-set on the table,
Ashes deep on the hearth—
And those I waked from dreams of
Beyond the bend of the Earth!

Noon—
And the silent-streaming tear-fall
From the lids of the down-cast sky;
Home-bound people huddling
And shivering in the dry;
Lunch beside a stranger
From a tarnished metal tray—
And all that ever loved me
A thousand miles away!

Night—
And the lonesome waning flicker
Of the musicless end of the show;
Dim-lit, barn-bound street-cars
In the traffic's diminuendo;
Rattle of key at midnight,
A grate unwarmed by a spark—
And a baby's toys standing
Patiently in the dark.

AN INTELLECTUAL'S FUNERAL

On such a day we put him in a box
And carried him to that last house, the grave;
All round the people walked upon the streets
Without once thinking that he had gone.
Their hard heels clacked upon the pavement
stones.

A voiceless change had muted all his thoughts
To a deep significance we could not know;
And yet we knew that he knew all at last.
We heard with grave wonder the falling clods,
And with grave wonder met the loud day.

The night would come and day, but we had died.
With new green sod the melancholy gate
Was closed and locked, and we went pitiful,
Our clacking heels upon the pavement stones
Did knock and knock for Death to let us in.

RUSTLING

The old cowboys had stern belief
  That law was theirs to keep or wreck;
And rustling cattle won the thief
  A length of rope around his neck.

Still nature's subjects went their way,
  They suffered not the lot of thieves:
The West was helpless any day
  To halt the rustling of the leaves.

But man and law, and nature, too,
  Declare a truce and wait to flirt;
They flutter and have much ado—
  They love the rustling of a skirt.

1928

MODERN VERSE

Most modern poetry is like
Dirty factories —
Little beautiful,
Little sweet.
Older poetry is like
Grey water mills,
    Splashing water,
    Flashing water,
And set in green woods.

So I do not read Whitman, nor Sandburg, nor
    Masters;
I read Housman and Shelley and Keats.

TO A SUICIDE

A breathless jousting with death's cunning lance,
A bold "Here's Luck!" called out before the close;
Yet who would barter April's tattered rose,
Or Autumn's tawny gold, or June's mad dance
For all the brave uncertainty of Chance?
That turbid stream that sings not as it flows,
That murky course whereon dull Charon rows
Lies far beyond the gay fields of Romance.
You that were free as wind, and wild and fleet,
And glad as cherry orchards heaped with snow,
And glorious as some gold argosy,
Are bound with fetters of a blind defeat—
And yet—perhaps you are more free and know
The quiet wonder of Persephone.

1928

LA PRISONNIERE

I once was mistress of myself
  Of arrant fancy free
To follow my own bidding
  And be what I chose to be.

But now I've lost my freedom,
  And now my heart bows down
To boutonnieres and trinkets
  And a hat with a high-peaked crown.

By silken chains led captive
  I'm charmed with the lure of town,
A thrall to jewelled slippers
  And a gold and scarlet gown.

O these things spell enchantment,
  And how can I break the spell,
For I love window-shopping
  Not wisely, but too well.

1928

MARATHON

I get so out of breath
I wouldn't make a good long-distance runner;
I'd never win a long-time dance contest;
By eleven, I get tired and sleepy;
I couldn't last through an endurance test:
In two minutes, I'd be scared and dizzy.
But in my lifetime, I've washed enough dinner
plates
To reach to Haviland—
I've scrubbed enough knives
To cut the earth in two—
I've cleaned enough cups
To serve tea to the Republic of China.

PAGAN

Pagan is the low wind's whisper
Breathing thru the trees' close fingers;
Pagan is the glint of moonlight
Shifting thru the dusky foliage;
Pagan is the water's murmur
Brushing stones and willow roots;
Pagan is the low, sweet music
Of the wind and water mingling
In a call of throaty richness,
Out into the dusk-deep darkness
To the youth who loiters near.

Pagan is the call of water;
Pagan is the call of love.

ABANDONED ROADS

We are the abandoned roads.
Beside the great highways we linger.
We have faltered, stumbled in the onward march,
And now we look wistfully on.
Resigned, like old people in chimney-corners,
We watch these young roads,
Smooth of face, broad-backed, strong-muscled.
How they swagger! How they conquer all obstacles!
"Narrow," they sneer, swerving past us.
Yes, we *are* narrow. No time had our makers for broad roads.
They must press forward!
But they stirred up our dust with their laughter,
Packed it down with their tears and the sweat of their bodies.
Through the years we have bowed to their burdens.
In their triumphs, defeats; in joyous procession, in mourning,
They have deepened our ruts, they have furrowed our faces.
In silence we watch while the young roads
Lift all care from our shoulders.
Soon our last faint traces will be hidden by grasses and wild flowers.

But we have lived abundantly,
We abandoned roads.

DISPOSSESSED

If One came crying, "Look upon that face
So well-beloved, for it soon will pass
Beyond your vision!"—how the gaze would cling!
With what impassioned force we would draw back
The tears into the heart, though the heart break
With weight of them; keep clear the eyes for sight
Of every changing line, shadow of thought
Glowing or fading as the moments go.
So wear the lineaments, etched by our tears
Upon our hearts, until those hearts be dust.

Now have I heard that cry: "Look! the day comes
When no more, standing thus, cloud-girt, wind-swept,
Your eyes shall scale the distant heights, or plunge
Into the deeps of green; no more the sight
Speed on and on where blue and violet blend
Into a mist, and mist be all enmeshed
Within the far horizons of the air."

And, to the sounding echo of that cry,
I gaze, clear-eyed, upon my Mountain Land.

1930

THE WAY

We have gone into the mountains, seeking
Gold—
And we have found it.
Not the yellow gold that glitters,
But the sunset splendor of the glacier-crested
peak;
The liquid moonlight flowing down the valley,
Singing silent songs about the sea.
Sonatas have we heard—undying melodies
Sweeping o'er eternal strings
The rush of mighty waters.
Solitude has taught us silence,
To hush the babble of our mortal tongues
And listen to the wisdom of the winds,
The counsel of the lordly stars, who say:
"The substance dreams are made of doth endure,
It is alone undying and eternal—"
We came not with pick and pan,
But with the open hearts of little children,
Meek and humble, with the staff of true desire;
Anon, Life has touched us with its secret.
We have gone into the mountains, seeking
Gold—
And we have found it.

1926

THE HOUSE

I built a house of words:
The lines stood out
Stark,
Staring,
Unclad in any sweet romantic sentiment.
It had no clinging vine of fancy,
Nor garden of poetic dreams;
Its walls were bleak and cold.
Had I not known it for a child of mine own pen,
I might have thought that Amy Lowell had
scribbled it
Here in my book.

THE TWO VIOLS

Softly now the mellow moonflower
Sheds its blue-gold pollen down
Upon my silent garden.
I walk among the pallid patterns
Cast on fountains, ferns, and pathways
And faintly hear two distant violins
Begin a sweet duet that fills the quiet night
With jewelled notes.
    How beautiful their dulcet tones, now low,
        now high—
Now thrilled with joy or touched with sadness!
And now the air is filled with more impassioned
Song—quick, chromatic treble tones that rise
And fall, dancing, tripping, pleading.
    But, alas! upon the perfumed breeze—
A sudden break—the vibrant voice of one is
        stilled.
    The other, bewildered, pauses—
And then resumes the song
With weird, dejected, sobbing notes
Which rise to agony and spend themselves
In one long, shivering minor tone
Upon the midnight air!

TODAY

The roses,
Which last night in bud
Were sweet and lovely,
Today scatter themselves
over the piano keys,
Or smile sickeningly
From the piano top.

One sheet of the love song
Lies on the floor—
Dirtied by a large heel print.
The other hangs upside down
On the piano rack—
Rather dejectedly.

A small lace handkerchief
Lies crumpled
On the right of the piano keys;
Several cigar stubs and many
cigarette ashes
Are in the ash tray at the other end;
The odors of both mingle and fade.

The fast-locked French doors
Shut out what little romance may
have been left,
And give entrance only
To the glare of the early morning sun.

TO AN OLD CYNIC

Pray, don't disillusion me;
I'm young and like to dream of all the things I
hope to be,
I'm gay and happy and carefree.
My life means much to me; yours doesn't now
You've lived it. Let me live mine as I choose;
Don't bother me by telling of your views,
And don't remind me of the things that I should
and shouldn't do,
I have my right to live the same as you.
Don't tear down all my castles in the air—
You know you are not playing fair
In telling me my dreams can ne'er come true.
When one is twenty all his life's a dream;
You had your hopes at my age, didn't you?
Because you failed, I may not do the same;
So let me have my dreams and plans and hopes
And let me learn from life that dreams can't
all come true,
But please don't disillusion me
By telling of the blows fate dealt to you.

1930

II

HAPPY ENDING

Why does it always have to end like that?
I like a story with a happy ending.

Of course you do. You're . . . an American.
America's the land of happy endings!
A movie man can't even sell a picture
Unless it ends up with a girl and money.
We're still a part of those wealth-drunken
days—
The "Golden Age" Beard calls it in his book—
When folks lit gas jets with ten-dollar bills
And walked on floors inlaid with silver dollars.
—Doesn't a newsboy turn into a broker?
A slum kid turn into a millionaire?
America's like a youth not used to sorrow,
That hasn't ever known a tragic ending.

But not so Europe. People there have learned
That when the coffer's full, and on the hill
The grain is ripening in the summer sun,
Voices singing in the fields, and grapes
Turning deep blue beneath the heavy leaves,
On comes some trumped-up quarrel that starts
a war
Over Alsace, or Schleswig, or Tyrol
And wipes out all the grain and clears the
coffers,
Silences the singing in the fields
And excavates the land with shell-torn holes.
—Till the next crop and the next horde is
gathered
And the next war wipes them all out again.

Earl Devon

There was a play in Austria last summer
In Wien (poor old Vienna!—plucked and drawn
And served up garnished to the tourist's taste),
A travesty upon America,
"The Duchess from Chicago" it was called;
And when the show was drawing to a close,
Orchestra blaring and confetti thrown,
Eleven chorus girls came dancing out
And on their hat-tops, as they bowed, was spelt
In big white letters: H—A—P—P—Y
E—N—D—I—N—G. The audience smiled
And said, "Ja, ja. Das ist Amerika!"

But when America has learned that life
Is not all dollar bills and limousines,
Golf, and lap-dogs, and tropical week ends;
Has learned that luck can break as well as make,
That panics can wipe out long years of wealth,
And wealth itself bring evils worse than want;
And when, resolved to force *her* national ego
(As soon as she's discovered what it is)
On nations of the world, losing herself
And what men call her splendid isolation
In quarrels that empty out *her* iron-barred vaults
And lay in waste *her* amber fields of grain. . . .

Then it will be that even America
Will learn what sorrow is, and what is life
—Will learn to understand a tragic ending.
And, if the blow has not been struck too hard,
May even learn what happiness is, too.

1928

EXPERIENCE

A child, I knew vast wonder, simple joys,
And haunting terrors, hunted, fished and swam,
Played ball and truant, fought with girls and boys,
And never dreamed of being what I am.

My time and others' means I freely wasted—
Yet how enjoyed!—in fledgling manhood days,
Along with other bitter sweets I tasted
The wine of woman's enigmatic gaze.

I learned why men to smoke and drink are led;
I went away to war with some still gone;
I've many times outwatched and envied
The haggard moon that creeps to bed at dawn.

Some vows I've made and broken secretly;
Some never formulated I have kept;
Some thoughts I've had of such sublimity
The stars alone knew of them—while men slept.

Though to the tales of brave, unselfish men
My heart has ever throbbed in kindred chord,
The embryonic crimes that spawn within
My mind, if known, would make my name abhorred.

John Zollie Howard

I've bent and kissed my sleeping firstborn's face,
Standing with his mother by his bed;
I've heard the clods begin their hollow base
Above the narrow dwelling of my dead.

What man has felt of poignant joys and griefs,
I too have felt; whatever man has done
I too have dabbled in; and his beliefs
I too have held—and let go—one by one.

This world's a Museum—there's the exit door,
And thru it crowds the tired, sightseeing rout;
And when I've looked around a little more,
I also shall be ready to go out.

1924

OF A CHRISTIAN TOWN

(The story of a burlesque of which the author was an eye-witness in 1916)

Of a Christian town in Dixie,
And its ritual, I sing:
Hosannas, hiccoughs, dances,
And burnt flesh offering.

Time was the town was wicked,
Till, on a vacant lot,
Was built a wooden forum
For an eloquent ex-sot,

By whose hypnotic passes,
With swaying hymns concerted,
The Devil was exorcised,
And the last soul converted.

The temple gone, a "Midway"
Soon occupied its place:
Some of the saved were eager
To test the power of grace.

The power of Grace they tested,
Also of Angeline,
And all the other dance-girls
At the garish "Forty-Nine;"
And there their taste they nourished
For the sacramental wine:

"Down with the stuff!" one shouted,
As down he straightway tossed it,
"Here's where I got religion,
And here is where I lost it!"

In time, like the revival,
The "Midway" found things dull,
And so moved on where nickels
Still rattled plentiful.

Some weeks, now, lies deserted
Our stage the vacant lot,
While Fate, with grin sardonic,
Invents another plot.

Then comes a negro moron
To prowl and steal and kill,
On which our gentle Christians
With holy bloodlust thrill.

They hunt him down and maim him;
They fight to get his ears,
His toes, and teeth and knuckles,
To keep as souvenirs.

They drag him at a gallop—
The poor wretch kicks and claws—
They hang him, stone him, shoot him,
While women scream applause.

Wood from the torn-down temple
Furnishes stake and fire,
And smoke, all black and stenchy,
Rolls heavenward from the pyre.

Of a Christian town in Dixie,
And its ritual, I sing:
Hosannas, hiccoughs, dances,
And burnt flesh offering.

OLD WIZARD EVOLUTION

or

What Became of the Children of Hamelin Town.

(To W. P.)

"Creakety, creakety, creakety,
Squeakety, squeakety, squeak!"
I looked from my window
And what should I see
But a wry little, spry little organ-man
A-squinting up at me!

II

His eyes, like the embers,
(Or haws in Septembers)
Under eyebrows and lashes,
(Like sparks from grey ashes)
Did gleam and did glow
Up at me from below;
His nose was as red
As the bud of the rose,
And long as the beak
Of a loon—I suppose;
His chin was as curved
As the horns of the moon,
And sharp as the claw
Of a crab I once saw;
While his mouth in between,
Like a rose you have seen,
Was duly protected
By the nose that curved in
And the chin that projected.
And high on his head,
Like a gay-colored parrot
Perched up on a pole,

(And red as a carrot,
And shaped like one, too)
A tapering hat,
With a hole in it, sat.
A velveteen coat
Did flutter and float;
His raggedy jeans,
Like his old velveteens,
With a dull flapping sound
Were wrapping him round—
Like a flag on a post,
Or a rag on a ghost.
But worse than the clothes,
And quaintly in keeping
With them, was each shoe
Where the curious toes
Came peeping thru.

III.

He kept grinding his organ
And staring and glaring
At me like a Gorgon;
While the monkey that he
Bore up on his shoulder,
Like an elf on a tree,
Growing bolder and bolder,
Blinked shyly at me,
Then, climbing the vine
To this window of mine,
He winked, and held up
An empty tin cup.
As hush money, I threw
A penny or two;
And lo, when aloud
They clinked, one by one,
The monkey then winked
And the little man bowed.

IV.

"I tell you," he said,
Still staring in my
Half-sleepy eye,
And holding me like
A snake holds a bird
With his creepy eye:
"Men call me just 'Mike,'
But I'm the Pied Piper
Who charms when he plays
Rat, child, and viper
In practical ways.
Neither Roman nor Greek
Am I while I speak
The whole truth to you:
I'm the Wandering Jew;
And I play to beguile
The foot-burning mile,
And to forget, if I may,
How far it is yet
To the dawn of Doomsday.

V.

"When I humbly applied
At Hamelin once
To play some inside,
They let me come in;
But all that I got,
And all Hamelin gave,
Was a beating hot
From sot and knave.
Alas, and alack!
How the sun did shine
On this back of mine!
How the sunbeams beat
From my head to my feet!

Like red-hot irons
Was the heavy heat,
And fierce as lions
The dogs of that street.
My cross that day
Was but this organ
Borne over my shoulder
Along the way,
While the sun, like a Gorgon,
Glared bolder and bolder,
While every old scolder,
And hog-eyed beholder,
Unbridled a tongue
That branded and stung,
Or threw stocks and stones,
Mud, rubbish and bones,
Along with such curses
As would sour sweet verses.
To the market place
And across the town,
At a rickety pace
Down, up, and down,
Prodded and clodded
By churl and clown,
Till out again
By the other gate
I groaned, and then
I thanked my fate
When on the hill,
And woods above,
All was so still
While one grey dove
Moaned drearily,
Mourned wearily
Alone with me.

VI.

"Till down I knelt
Above the knotted,
Wormy, rotted,
Squirmy roots,
And frailest shoots,
Where soon I felt
A hairy heap
Of mice asleep.
They nestled up
Into my fingers;
I felt the warmth
That in flesh lingers
After sleep
Into me creep
Softly, slowly,
Like something holy.
So tenderly
I laid them in
A curly bed
Of half the thin
Hairs from my head.
I then made me
A basket, too,
Of twigs that grew
So slenderly
I was afraid
Some fairy maid
It was I slew.
In this wee house
I tucked each mouse,
My organ then
I opened wide,
Put it inside,
And rose again.

VII

"Below me lay
The gabled town;
The many-peopled,
-steepled town;
The river-bounded,
Wall-surrounded,
Devil-hounded
Hamelin,
All circled in.
I slowly wound
Down, down, down,
For I forgave,
And not in hate,
The same low gate
Reentered in,
But just to save
Those children sweet
From as sad a sin
As they'd repeat,
When they were grown,
On some forlorn
Old man like me.
The porter jeered,
But let me thru;
'Twas as I feared—
The burghers knew
Me from the first;
They spit and cursed,
And tagging after
With nagging and laughter
And shameful glee,
They shouted and clouted
A rout after me;

Until at last
Half-leaping, half-cast,
I did arrive
In the market alive.

VIII.

"A buzzy hive,
'Twas humming, humming,
Where all the people
Were going and coming:
A strumming poet
Was singing and playing;
A drumming crier
Was sing-song saying;
Higher and higher
His twanging rose
Above the bustling,
The banging and blows,
Then, drowned by the clanging,
It died in his nose;
As battered and tattered
And mud-bespattered
By the crowd that clattered
And clopped, I stopped
In the square, and dropped
My organ down,
In the very middle
Of the town.
A big man in yellow
Did bawl and bellow:
'Bring out your fiddle,
Old fellow, and wring
The music that's in it!
That's the thing!
Only just spin it
And out comes what's in it!
Now then—begin it!'

IX.

"Slowly I turned,
Then faster and faster
I churned and I churned
That town to disaster,
For—'creakety, creakety, creakety,
Squeakety, squeakety, squeak!'
Those little mice made
Such a noise when I played
With squeaking and shrieking,
The kittens all cocked up
Their ears and came bounding
From ribbons and rings,
And soft, silky strings;
And the cats, at that sounding,
Ran out till they blocked up
The corners surrounding;
And then, as I hurried
Away, how they scurried
And scampered behind me!
And chasing them followed
All the doggies uncollared;
And whistling and crying,
The children came flying:
Girls chasing their kitties,
Boys racing their doggies,
While all of the city's
Revilers, amazed,
Seemed as stonily dazed
As if on my organ
Blazed the head of the Gorgon!

X.

"So we slipped away,
Skipping and shipping
Beyond Cathay,
To the mountain-studded
Evergreen isles
That bloomed and budded
Blue miles away,
For the sunshine flooded
Them every day,
Until each shone
Like an emerald stone.

XI.

"And there we lived
In the jewelled sea,
Dwelling in coral
Cave, or in tree;
With birds in the branches,
With fish in the sea;
Among the green waves
That ruffled the tree,
Or the turquoise blue
Of the feathery sea.
Sucking the coconut,
Plucking the fruit
Of sea-bed or bower
In oyster and root—
The honey-bee flower
Of each sunny hour!

XII.

"And there dwelt I
While one by one
A dear child died
With each dying sun,
And one was born
On each sunrise
With leaf-green hair
And sea-blue eyes.
And there dwelt I,
And there had stayed
While their children clambered
Or swam and played,
And the years died softly
In sun and shade,
Had mortals kept
Their forms and faces,
And Change not crept
That moulds, replaces
The hand that climbs,
The foot that dives,
Thru growing ages
Of our lives
To feathered wing
And to fishy tail,
So one may sing,
And one may sail;
For Evolution,
A Wizard wise,
Old as Time
And the sea and skies,
Knows secret wants
And needs and wishes
And shapes the seal
And the flying fishes.
And tho he once

Had fashioned these
Island children
With human features
From slimy creatures
In dragon seas,
He now undid
What he had done,
And formed them strangely
One by one;
Until at last
I understood
How the satyr roamed
In the Grecian wood
With the bubble-throated
Nightingale,
And the mermaid sported
With dolphin tail
In the cradling waves
Of the sea that rocks,
Her golden locks
For a floating sail.
Into birds and fishes
Did Evolution
Make girls and boys
As his solution
Of their wishes
And secret need.
I sorrowed to see
A change so strange,
But at last agreed
That he was wise
And the queerness lay
In these two eyes.

XIII.

"Some were tame
And some were wild,
But none so sweet
As one sweet child;
And tho I had
Bright pets and many,
I grew too sad
To quite love any;
And so all flew
Or swam away,
And I, too, left
That isle one day
Bringing only
A little, lonely
Pet with me—
This very monkey
That now you see
Begging pennies
From you for me.
We two set sail
On the first whale-boat
That was ever afloat,
On the humping back
Of a pumping whale
That hit the water
A thumping smack
When the monkey pinched
Him on the tail—
It struck the water
Like a flail
And wet us thru—"

XIV.

I shivered, too,
Just as he ceased,
For that small beast,
While dipping and dishing
My goldfish out
To Libby, the cat,
Had drenched me thru
While nodding, I sat.
In great surprise
I rubbed both eyes;
I pinched my nose;
Laid by my book;
Shook out my clothes;
And craned and crooked
My neck, and looked,
And looked, and l o o k e d ! ! !

XV.

"Creakety, creakety, creakety,
Squeakety, squeakety, squeak!!"
And what should I see
But that wry little, spry little organ-man
Beguiling away from me:
Betty's white kitty,
On thru the city,
And Betty and Bob, all three!
For the monkey now sat
On 'Mike,' while the cat
And the children ran after
With shout and with laughter,
And I—*dashed out after that!*

1923-1930

THE WASTED HOUR

I think I shall waste an hour.
The sun will not let me bore into these books,
And I see no good reason for haste.

I am over-weary of clambering up;
I'll walk through the long meadow,
The crumpled thoughts and the twisted looks
Unbend, as I walk by spring brooks.

I'll set the brim of my hat
At a cavalier angle and thrash at the weeds
With an iron-wood saber and scatter the seeds—

I'll fare up the hill to be with the stone fence,
And across three fields the broken earth will say
I was a boy once. But look at me now!
I'm better than a farmer, a farmer with his plow.

There will be sycamores, and drooping willow
switches,
To startle with dry bones upright in the sun.
I peer under brush piles for a moment only,
But for all of my fancy, there are no witches.

And now I bend a mullein stalk, for if it grows
again,
I'll have a true love yet, and I shall feel pain—
True pain at fifty, were that not fine?
Were it not worth an hour to know that it was
mine?

Or is it well to wander thus in a quiet afternoon,
To think fallen blossoms better than flowers now,
Or that I'm a better man than a farmer with his plow?

I see no red-men pounding down the pasture trails,
But only children's ponies with pathetic tails.
I have walked through the long meadow;
I am weary enough to go home.

And I have no more hours to waste,
And I have no more faith in my own lies,
And I have very good reasons for haste.

Stanley Johnson

PIER

It is Pier by his candle, thinking one has called;
Grips his pen and stares at the words he has scrawled,
Mutters as he slips lean fingers through his hair,
To shiver in the silence: "There is really no one there!"

And he dreams that Eva was fairer than all the gods—
Candle whispers; dry thoughts rattle in his brain's dry pods.
A cold wind is blowing across his soul's waste moors,
And one is moving, stalking him down lonesome corridors.

Pier digs in the sunlight turning up gloom—
Drops his spade and clatters into the quiet room.
Silent there as ever, low ceilinged, four walled;
There is no one there—no one has called.

Cackle witted, pain footed, Pier dabbles around.
Neighbors whisper, "There's Pier, where on earth is he bound?"
Candle burns, lighting crescents in Pier's eyes like moons—
Eva's face in the candle flame—else his thoughts are loons.

It is Pier by his candle now—the lost is found;
His bark long adrift on a dear coast is aground.
What if thoughts grow big till they fray at the ends?
They weave you a pattern at least, Pier contends.

What if devils come blowing through the soul
at night?
"They can't have it all," says Pier, "not quite.
If you've once seen her face as I have," says
Pier,
"Devils or none"—What's this? There is no
flame here?

No face! That is strange. Surely, Pier, you are
evil;
No flame could escape without aid of the devil.
"Which way?" say the neighbors. "A flame can-
not run."
To the woods? Well, now, you saw it? Well, this
is fun!

Cackle witted, pain footed, Pier sold out his
house—
Plain to be seen his poor wits on carouse.
Wandered off to the forest; he never came back,
And, for all we'd known of him, it was no great
lack.

Oh, he caught her at last, at least in his way,
On a strip of water where new moonlight lay;
And he fathomed her out, this Eva he had
known,
Holding in his foolish hand a dripping stone.

Pier walks in the forest—you've heard of Pier?
Owned the small house—it's been many a year.
Starting and peeping behind the trees' black
boles,
You'd say, if you saw him, he was stalking souls.

1922

A MATTER OF RECORD

All in a late wet afternoon of winter
I heard your feeble knock and bade you enter.
I made ado to trim the fire's flame;
And was "glad to see you"—I was "glad you
came"—
Availed myself of terms as well as might be
To snare the fancy you were permanent with
me.

For well I knew that night was blowing up
Along the river and soon its empty cup
Would be inverted over me as black as ever.
You were to be a sort of Mighty Giver
Of dreams, I suppose, for I was in a mind
To consider even mockery essentially kind.

I put your wraps aside and we sat thawing
Without words and heard the steam-boat blow-
ing
For the locks to open, and the cawing chill
Of crows from cedar houses on the hill:
And quick your tears were all but running
over—
I raked the ashes and I poked the fire for cover.

"This love of ours," you said, "is chill as snow;
And I loved you more warmly than the slow
Sunlight loves which turns the buck-eyes brown.
Why, surely these dead fields were raked and
sown
With sunlight—none of them lay fallow,
And now winter's here—even they are yellow."

A smiling took you. I rose but sat again,
And I tried to speak but heard only the rain,
And saw the lewd white eye of the buck-eye staring—
The chasm of the river rent with flairing
Sweeps of rain dead silver underneath—
As I paused—and labored—and got my breath.

"This love of yours," I said, "speaks strangely here.
Before this audience of the rain, why fear
To know I love you as I love the sycamore
Whose slender fingers scratch against the door,
The fleeing whiteness of whose limbs I see
All night within the darkness over me?"

"You love me with the hills, the trees, this river,
The penciled curve your fingers draw, but never,
So help me Love," you said, "have my caresses
Raised half so sweet a storm as this which passes
And fills you now with sycamores and the wind's blowing
And soon will fill you with the pathos of my going."

Our storm was slight, your own at any rate,
Though that outside came hissing down the grate.
"You loved such things as fruit," I said, "and birth;
At least I served some purpose in the earth—
A seasonal promise of more men to come—
You'll have them now—a husband, children, home."

"This love of yours," you said, "is weaker still
Than mine which brazens winter by this hill.
Yet I suppose this tree, this sycamore
Will scratch a sort of comfort on your door.
You'll have such beauty always—form and
line—
You'll have such beauty—you will not have
mine."

You cloaked the lightning of your hair again,
Drew on your fragrant armor against the rain.
I clawed the oaken door to see you going;
Outside we heard ironic winter blowing.
And then your rather tragic voice once more—
"If only—if only you had locked the door."

SONNETS OF THE YELLOW LEAF

I

The chronicle of summer days is closed;
Conviction breaks at last your long restraint
To say that passion in your heart reposed
But hid its revelry from me, the saint.

Yet ever our footsteps dogged the green valleys
For coverts deep enough to pacify
The quaint fear startled in your soul's alleys.
And many quiet pools we lingered by.

And now the summer's ended—it is pale
With the chill ghost that will be coming soon,
And only the plaint quaver of the quail
Burgeons the summer plantings of the moon.

You gathered white flowers with a maiden's
clutch;
I fancied then—you did not love me much.

II

You owed allegiance to so many gods
And I was least of all with whom you strove—
You could not heed the sound of bursting pods
The summer long, nor fill one cubicle with love.

The poplar leaves one day were sternly driven;
Black sorcery of crows came figured on
Our patch of sky, and you said, "Even
Now they have much need of me at home."

You set the cover of the bed aright,
You made the broth for the baby's lips to drink,
And in the narrow room in the waning light
Made me to hold the puny hands and—think.

Outside the storm rode, driving God to cover,
While I kept house, the wet-nurse, the grand
lover!

III

Green bend the poplar trees by Cumberland,
And skyward lift white arms of sycamore;
And there we walked upon the meager sand
While fast behind us summer closed the door.

I analyzed the wreckage of the year—
The smitten leaf, the leering buck-eye's burial,
Your drooping cheeks; when, lo, down there
The river brought misfortunate memorial:

I saw within the jesting water's marge
Your soft young face blur out with age, and
after
Came wrinkles in the mirror's quiet surge,
To move the poplar leaves and me to laughter.

But terror favored your stare like the gray stone,
A tremor shook you, you wept, and the glory
was gone.

IV

A shiver sounded on the garden wall—
I heard just then your foot upon the stair;
And then the falling leaf's processional
Woke me and showed me wet with a flair

Of snowflakes driven upon the window ledge;
The leaves were blown and buried deep in snow,
But I had walked in sleep by the water's edge
Of Cumberland, to wake—and find you—so.

You brought late harvest of the summer's plant-
ing,
Rich fruitage of your soul's release, I thought,
Until you told me, tremulously panting,
"Yes, oh, yes, I love you—for I ought."

Then gray familiar glimpses of the moon
Sang this refrain—we must be going soon.

FOUR WINDS

The East Wind is impatient, and would pass by with empty scorn, and hurry to the west. Seeking something . . . it is too fickle to know just what. Why, the East Wind is shallow and cannot make friends; it holds them too lightly. The East Wind is a jest.

The South Wind is a drink of old wine, a flood of warm memories. It is old, and wise, and true, carrying youth as its companion. The South Wind is loved and is never forgotten. The moon is its bride. But it is not serious; rather it would talk the years away. Still, the South Wind is an old sweet song.

And the North Wind—why does he wish to sit around the winter fires, and tell his tales of bitter death, of men who were starved and strangled, of women who call out to God in their torture, of babies that exchange warm flesh for icy bones? Yes, he is truth, but we had far rather listen to other things—love and music and songs of southern lands. Why, the North Wind is just a hardened old boasting soldier.

The West Wind is a promise—it brings hope. Eager from its plunge thru a lashing raincloud, it greets like a lost friend. Without the West Wind it would be so easy to be an infidel . . . for it swears that God is in the west . . . Don't you see His evening candle light? The West Wind bears tidings.

1930

SELF-CONTEMPT

I—*I*—who had loved the *Rubaiyat,*
Thanatopsis, and oh, what not,
And wouldn't hear the sentimental rot
About "the encircling gloom;"
I—who had worshipped Edgar Masters,
And couldn't fear for the disasters
Of a time they'd set *my* casters
Rolling toward a *tomb*—

I, who had seen how slight *they* fear
The grave; and how they jeer
The moan, the groan, the tear
Of them that are left behind.
I who had called a spade, a spade,
And was no more afraid
Of death than of the maid
Who milked the kine—

I still am unafraid of dark
And shroud and bier and loss of spark,
Unafraid to chase the lark
That flies from off the shelf.
But once I cursed the *Rubaiyat,*
Old Spoon River, and oh, what not;
Thanatopsis, and all that rot,
And most of all — myself.

For when *she* called me to her bed
To talk to her e're she was dead,
Could not remember what I'd read,
A single word!

She held my hand; began to cry.
She said she did not want to die,
While I could only squirm and sigh,
And say, "Oh, Lord!"

She said she was afraid to go.
She asked me if this were all, and oh,
She asked me if God lived, and so
Would care for her.
She tore her hair and nails, and wept,
And all the while the coldness crept
Till after long, long hours, she slept —
The tears still there.

1929

BEGGAR WOMAN

Winter is a beggar woman.
Poor and gaunt her hands stretch forth
Like barren branches of a tree.
Her voice is shrill as wind that blows
Thru some deserted shack
Left open to the storm,
And in the monotone she moans
Her tale of woe.

II

Winter is a lonely woman.
Homeless and comfortless, she walks the streets alone.
Never the trill of a bird's song
Thrilling for mate and nest,
Nor the soft heart-beat of a baby leaf,
Nor a pansy face, wet with dew.
Only the dark and the silence,
Only the cold and the snow.

III

Winter is an old woman,
Old, how old and bent.
Her hard bones crackle as icicles do
When they crash to the ground
From the old barn roof,
And her thin white hair
Blows in wisps to and fro.

IV

Winter came to town today;
Not a soul has seen her,
But I know that she is here
For I heard her pass my window
And she whispered to herself.
Soon her step will sound on every garden path,
And soon her lean old hand come knocking at the door.
Lonely woman, old woman, beggar woman knocking at my door.

1926

GOOD-BYE

Close up the book:
The tale is told,
The candle's sputtering,
The grate is cold;
Futile the tear
That wells to the eye—
Time's come at last
To say "Good-bye."
Close up the book,
But keep it near:
The soul of Young Joy
Is buried here;
She was so fragile,
Naught but a wraith;
Never lived truly
Until her death.
Brush off the tear-drop,
Stifle the sigh:
Perhaps it is better
To say "Good-bye."

—J. Z. H.